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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1263
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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 6011
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 2554
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 000529

SIPDIS

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NEA/MAG FOR ROBERT EWING AND JAMES FLOWERS
EUR/WE FOR GARY CLEMENTS AND ANGELA CERVETTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [UNSC](#) [SP](#) [WI](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN COURTS ALGERIA AND MOROCCO DESPITE WESTERN
SAHARA IMPASSE

REF: STATE 35098

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This is an action request message (see paragraphs 3 and 11).

12. (C) NOTE: The conversations in this message took place prior to receipt of refTel on briefing Spain and other countries on our latest Western Sahara efforts, which we will report via separate telegram. END NOTE.

13. (C) SUMMARY: After concluding delicately choreographed high-level visits to both Morocco and Algeria in early March, the Spanish government is seeking consultations with the Polisario in Madrid and is also contemplating shuttle diplomacy to Group of Friends capitals. President Zapatero's visit to Morocco met with media criticism in Spain, although the Summit's joint communique mentioned the Sahrawi right to self-determination. Meanwhile, Algeria set an unfortunate tone for the visit of King Juan Carlos to Algeria by announcing a price hike in natural gas exports to Spain on the day of the visit. Nevertheless, the GOS insists that it is maintaining a balanced approach which respects both Moroccan and Algerian interests in the Western Sahara debate. MFA Deputy Director General for North Africa Manuel Gomez-Acebo told Poloff that there is an Algeria red-line which the government will not cross to endorse a Moroccan autonomy plan. He also cautioned that any proposed solution that is too favorable to the Moroccans will meet with opposition in the UN Security Council from both Russia and South Africa. (ACTION REQUEST: Embassy suggests that as we brief Gomez-Acebo here on refTel that NEA DAS Gordon Gray consider phoning him to shore up Spanish resolve, and reinforce our desire for Spanish efforts to help bring the Polisario to the table.) END SUMMARY.

//ZAPATERO VISITS MOROCCO//

14. (U) President Zapatero led a high-level delegation to Rabat for a two-day summit with King Mohammed VI on March 5-6. King Mohammed marked the visit, and the birth of his daughter, by freeing 52 Spanish prisoners. While ministers conducted bilateral meetings on a wide range of subjects including immigration, energy, and counter-terrorism, Spanish media highlighted President Zapatero's comments on Western

Sahara. Zapatero expressed appreciation for Morocco's autonomy plan and said Morocco should use it as a tool to restart dialogue with the Polisario and reach a lasting resolution in compliance with international law. He expressed Spain's willingness to work with both sides to find consensus. The joint communique from the Summit said the following: "The two parties renewed their commitment to find a political solution that is just, definitive, and mutually acceptable within the framework of the United Nations. Morocco revealed to the Spanish party the broad outlines of its autonomy proposal, which it intends to present shortly. The Spanish party received this proposal with interest and considers that it could generate a new dynamic for dialogue to overcome the current impasse and move forward from this base with the objective of achieving an understanding of this conflict which assures the principle of self-determination."

15. (C) While the declaration maintained Spain's commitment to Sahrawi self-determination, Zapatero met with criticism in Spain for allegedly shifting Spanish foreign policy away from Algeria toward Morocco - reflecting the Spanish Left's emotional attachment to the Polisario. Foreign Minister Moratinos felt compelled to respond and wrote in a March 13 editorial in EL PAIS, "There is no deviation from the principles of reference, rather there is a message which underscores the importance of initiating a phase of dialogue on the profound questions which both sides have...We are compelled to help (the parties) close the thirty-year-old open wound which is impeding the rise of a united and prosperous Maghreb." The same day, the Spanish Parliament unanimously approved a non-binding resolution expressing its support for the Sahrawi people and urging Morocco to release Sahrawi prisoners.

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//KING JUAN CARLOS VISITS ALGERIA//

16. (U) A week after the Morocco summit, King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia paid their first visit to Algeria since 1983. The visit began poorly due to the unexpected announcement by President Bouteflika that Algeria would be raising the price of natural gas exports to Spain by as much as twenty percent, which many in Spain saw as linked directly to Zapatero's comments in Morocco. During their formal meetings and speeches, however, Bouteflika did not mention Western Sahara and the King did so only once without making reference to the Moroccan autonomy plan. Moratinos told the press, "Spain is against any unilateral proposal...Now it is time for the other party (the PF) to pronounce itself on the topic."

//MFA EXPECTS VISITS FROM POLISARIO AND VAN WALSUM//

17. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for North Africa Manuel Gomez-Acebo told Poloff March 20 that following the two visits, Spain is hoping to host a Polisario Front delegation in Madrid to discuss next steps. The invitee was yet to be determined, either PF "foreign minister" Mohamed Uld Salek or the more preferable representative to the UN Ahmed Bujari. Gomez-Acebo also said that UNSE Van Walsum would likely visit Madrid on or about March 26, and he said that Spanish Director General Alvaro Iranzo is looking to coordinate more closely with the Group of Friends in advance of the April reports from the Secretary General, Van Walsum, and eventually Morocco. Iranzo has approached the British about potentially organizing a group meeting of Directors General, but scheduling appears to be an issue with Holy Week on the horizon. Iranzo may elect to travel to capitals instead.

//THE AFRICAN UNION, SOUTH AFRICA, AND RUSSIA//

18. (C) At Poloff's prompting, Gomez-Acebo discussed the potential impact of final status resolution on the African Union. He noted that the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is a member of the African Union and also had been recognized by South Africa and other nations and that this status appears

to precondition a final outcome of independence for Western Sahara. Spain finds that assumption troublesome. Gomez-Acebo noted that in prior consultations, Spain has found the Government of South Africa, particularly the FM, to be rabidly pro-independence. He cautioned that given South Africa's Security Council membership and Russia's support for the Algerian position, any proposal that is too favorable to Morocco will be a non-starter at the UNSC.

//MANDATE RENEWAL//

¶9. (C) As in previous meetings, Gomez-Acebo reiterated that Spain's objective for the Minurso renewal is to ensure that it not be a technical rollover and that it seek to establish a dialogue based on the Moroccan autonomy plan but also respecting self-determination. The Security Council cannot ignore the plan, but it ought not go overboard in supporting it either, given Morocco's reticence to address self-determination.

//SPIN//

¶10. (C) Gomez-Acebo acknowledged that the timing of Bouteflika's natural gas announcement was unfortunate, but he noted that Bouteflika later revised his remarks and said that negotiations on gas interests were ongoing with multiple Spanish energy companies. Gomez-Acebo similarly dismissed press reaction to Zapatero's Morocco trip as atmospheric. He said that there is a historically established Spanish red line that the government will not cross in its dealings with Morocco on Western Sahara, which is the right of Sahrawi self-determination. Moratinos attributed the criticism to those whose "real motivation is not the present or future of the Sahara...so much as their desire to disqualify at any cost the work of the Spanish government."

//COMMENT//

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¶11. (C) While Western Sahara dominated press coverage of the bilateral visits, Spain closed important economic, judicial, migration and security agreements with both North African nations, and the visits could have gone worse. Nonetheless, Western Sahara remains a very important issue to Spaniards. Zapatero's policy, viewed as leaning toward Morocco, has become something of a problem in Spain's volatile political climate approaching regional and local elections on May 27. The Zapatero government already faces a media storm and intense opposition pressure and mistrust over the government's handling of the terrorist group ETA. Many Spaniards viewed Algeria's decision to hike the price of natural gas as a direct result of Zapatero's visit to Morocco, and some viewed the King's task in Algeria as cleaning up a "mess" that Zapatero and Moratinos had created in Rabat. It is in the U.S. interest to bolster Spain's willingness to support current U.S. efforts, including getting the Polisario to the table. If Algeria opposes, the Zapatero government will be in a difficult position and might calculate based on possible political impact in the upcoming elections. (ACTION REQUEST: We therefore suggest that in addition to Embassy outreach to the MFA on this subject, NEA DAS Gordon Gray follow up with a phone call to Gomez-Acebo (or Director General Iranzo) to lead the GOS through U.S. thinking.) END COMMENT.

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Aguirre